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## Brigham Young: American Moses/The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt

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Madsen does not study the responses of other regions to these forces. Nor does he look at General Connor's volunteers in the context of the Civil War in the West, or of James Carleton's treatment of New Mexico's Navajos and Apaches at the Bosque Redondo (1862-1866). One cannot rely solely on documents written by nation-builders, such as the Office of Indian Affairs, the army, and the Mormon church, to question the wisdom of such a policy. Nor can a singular emphasis on conflict and violence address the daily life and community traditions of both whites and Indians.

These concerns notwithstanding, Brigham Madsen's honesty and diligence represent an advance over his peers. Future students of the region would do well to consult his work as they widen their angle of vision on Utah, the Mormons, native peoples, and the nineteenth-century West.

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*Brigham Young: American Moses*, by Leonard J. Arrington. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985. xvii, 522 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliographical essay, index. \$24.95 cloth.

*The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt*, by Breck England. Foreword by Leonard J. Arrington. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985. xvi, 359 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 cloth.

Changes in the manner in which historians define their work no less than changes within contemporary American society have served to provoke new interest in the history, thought, and sociology of Mormonism. This most successful of nineteenth-century American religious and communitarian movements was long ignored except by Mormon scholars and anti-Mormon polemicists. Yet some of the very factors that formerly led to neglect have contributed to contemporary interest. Mormonism is clearly a popular movement that emerged from the ranks of common people. Mormon theology weaves together biblical themes and American experience to create a millennialism that, though unique, is closely akin to that which dominated American religious thought at least until the latter years of the nineteenth century. Mormon plural marriage and economic practices are regarded as radical, but few religious movements are as comfortable as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with the climate of conservatism that now dominates American political, economic, and intellectual life. One evidence of contemporary interest in this movement has been the emergence of a growing body of fine historical studies of Mormonism

authored by Mormons and non-Mormons alike. The two biographies considered in this review are valuable additions to contemporary literature on Mormonism. As the work of Mormon scholars, both also illustrate the high quality of historical criticism that church authors commonly bring to such work today.

Brigham Young and Orson Pratt were commanding figures among Mormons during their first generation in Utah. Brigham Young is well known today as the successor to Joseph Smith, who, following the Prophet's murder, led the faithful from Illinois to their final Zion at the Great Salt Lake. Though less familiar to non-Mormons today, Orson Pratt was familiar to nineteenth-century gentiles as the Mormon theologian, missionary to Britain, and defender of the faith against its cultured and not-so-cultured despisers. Both are appropriate subjects for biographical study, and both of these books are useful contributions to our understanding of these men and the movement that so fully engaged their lives.

In many ways the lives of Young and Pratt were strikingly alike. Young was born in Vermont in 1801 and reared in New York state. Pratt was born in New York in 1811. From modest family backgrounds and with minimal formal education, both became early converts of Joseph Smith's new religion. Both were involved in the Mormon migrations to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Both were initially shocked by the revelation of plural marriage, but in time both became practitioners as well as ardent defenders of the doctrine. Both left Nauvoo with the first wave of Mormons bound for the Great Basin. Young died as president of the church in 1877, and Pratt was generally regarded as its ablest theologian when he died four years later.

Yet there are also profound differences between Pratt and Young. From a consideration of these differences readers may derive insight into the nature of Mormonism as well as into the personalities of the two men. Brigham Young is properly remembered as a community builder, the man who inspired and organized the Mormon community in Utah. Always active, a successful businessman, and first territorial governor of Utah, Young maintained control over the community through his power as president of the church. Profoundly sensitive to community needs and threats to its unity, Young could be despotic, self-satisfied, and totally insensitive to the appearance of his activities to non-Mormons or even to critical Mormons. In granting that he was "not a systematic theologian" (201), Arrington states only the obvious. Always practical, Young clearly had little interest in theology save in its practical implications. On the other hand, Pratt was, in spite of his limited formal education, intensely interested in mathematics, science, theology, and their interrelationship. Like any good apologist, he had an

intense interest in dialogue with the non-Mormon world. He elaborated some of the major themes in Mormon theology: the anthropomorphic conception of God in his *Prophetic Almanac*, an elaboration of the doctrine of intelligent matter in *Great First Cause*, a defense of plural marriage in *The Seer* and in a debate with the chaplain of the U.S. Senate, and a defense of the church's primary canon in *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*. Pratt was as impractical as Young was practical; the two were frequently at odds over Pratt's theological speculations, and in every confrontation Young prevailed. Only Young's death ended this long struggle and Pratt's "sullen submissiveness" (264).

Brigham Young has been the subject of many biographies, and every one presents a somewhat different figure. Leonard Arrington's study is far more balanced than some of the older studies and reflects the author's access to an extensive collection of archival materials in his former capacity as director of the history division of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It also reflects the competence of a professional historian. Arrington is professor of western history at Brigham Young University and coauthor of the widely praised *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*. However, few will find in this volume the definitive study of Young. Conflicts, particularly conflicts within the Mormon community, are slighted, and there is a consistent sympathy for Young's position in the account of virtually every important conflict that is considered. Arrington observes, for example, that the controversies with Pratt over Mormon theology "indicate how far the President was willing to go in tolerating differing points of view on key doctrinal questions" (207). Actually, though, the controversies are dramatic evidence of one of the least attractive aspects of Young's personality in his merciless badgering and humiliation of Pratt long after the latter had submitted to the president's authority. On the other hand, Arrington does place Young in a historical context that transcends Mormonism. This is a significant achievement, and the biography will be greatly appreciated by social and religious historians of nineteenth-century America.

Orson Pratt has been as much ignored as Brigham Young has been studied. *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* is the first major biographical study of the man who must be regarded as the primary theologian of nineteenth-century Mormonism, unless one accords the honor to Joseph Smith. The author, Breck England, is a high school history and English teacher in Bountiful, Utah, and former cataloguer and researcher for the historical department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his wife is Pratt's great-great-granddaughter. Do not, however, expect hagiography. This is a very competent biography and an important contribution both to Mormon history and, per-

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haps more significantly, to Mormon thought. Precisely because the tradition of active community building in Mormonism that Young represents has dominated and virtually overwhelmed the more intellectual and speculative tradition that Pratt represents, the latter has received little careful attention by Mormon or non-Mormon scholars. Yet theology remains a crucial element in Mormon life and must be understood if the church and its history are to become fully comprehensible. England is not thoroughly familiar with the broader context of nineteenth-century religious thought and therefore is not as effective in placing Pratt's ideas in context as one might wish. Yet this is an important study, and every student of nineteenth-century American religious and social history has reason to be grateful for it.

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